

<b>DATE:</b>	2021 September 10
<b>TO:</b>	All Health Care Providers
<b>FROM:</b>	Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
<b>RE:</b>	<b>Update to COVID-19 variant of concern testing strategy</b>

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### Key Message

- Effective Sep. 10, 2021, COVID-19 variant of concern testing will be performed only for specific populations:
  - Hospitalized and emergency room patients
  - Patients involved in outbreaks
  - Healthcare workers
  - Recent international travelers

### Background

- Testing for COVID-19 variants of concern (ie, B.1.1.7 [Alpha], B.1.351 [Beta], P.1 [Gamma], and B.1.617.2 [Delta]) has been performed on COVID-19 positive samples detected in Alberta since early 2021.
- Positivity rates and overall test volumes of COVID-19 have rapidly increased, necessitating a change in the testing strategy to maintain laboratory capacity and turnaround times.
- Populations with either a higher risk of being infected with a variant of concern or in higher risk scenarios for spreading a variant of concern are now being targeted for testing.
- Variant of concern testing is a surveillance tool and not a diagnostic test – results continue to be reported to physicians and Public Health and are not reported directly to patients by the laboratory.

### Actions required

- No actions are required – continue to fill out the correct patient and sample information when ordering COVID-19 testing on the paper requisitions or in the clinical information system as is the current practice. Healthcare worker status and the Exposure Investigation (EI) number (used for outbreaks) need to be indicated if applicable.
- Samples will be identified by the laboratory as belonging to one of the populations requiring variant testing and results will be reported as per routine.

### Inquiries and feedback may be directed to

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### Approved By

- Dr. Graham Tipples, Medical Scientific Director, APL – Public Health Laboratory